

INTRODUCTION



“I wish to embrace each and every one of you.”

There is a stunning picture of Pope Francis on July 24, 2013, gathered in a circle with recovering addicts, his arms around them, theirs around him, as they pray together.

When one suffers from addiction, the fear is ever present that one is worthless, unlovable, and that there’s no way out. But Pope Francis stands with addicts, encouraging them to seek recovery and affirming that the promise of recovery is real.

On that day in 2013, he said to the addicts, “Today, in this place where people struggle with drug addiction, I wish to embrace each and every one of you, who are the flesh of Christ, and to ask God to renew your journey, and also mine, with purpose and steadfast hope.”

By joining his journey to theirs...and ours...may all of us—addict, person in recovery, or pilgrim in distress—gain new hope and the realization that, far from being alone, we have Pope Francis and the Jesus he serves as companions on the road to recovery!

The quotes from Pope Francis were chosen by Deborah McCann, who also wrote the reflections and the “Ponder” and “Pray” pieces.

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1 | RECOVERY IS POSSIBLE

*You can get up, you can stand up.
It is difficult, but it is possible if you want to.*

Pope Francis stands ready to embrace the addict as a full-fledged reflection of the face of Christ. But, he says, embracing is not enough. The addict has to be ready to set aside an entire way of being in order to enter the painful but life-renewing path of recovery. But whether we are the one extending the hand or the one reaching out to grasp, we are part of the most important rescue mission possible—the restoration of a human being to full potential, to recovery of spirit and soul as well as of body, to the triumph of hope over despair. “It is possible,” says Pope Francis. If he believes this, shouldn’t we all?

PONDER

What in me am I most ashamed of that needs healing?

PRAY

God of health and wholeness, I am afraid to be healed. Heal me!

2 | THE COURAGE TO CHANGE

*You have to want to stand up;
this is the indispensable condition!*

There is no more crucial moment in an addict's life than the moment when the realization hits that life isn't working this way. The "bottom" we hit is real and devastating, whether "high" or "low." From that perspective, the amount of courage required to consider recovery as an option is immense—but there's only one person who can make that choice. Pope Francis says that there will be hands ready to grasp, and arms to embrace, on what he calls "our journey," but no one else can take that first step but the addict. Trust is a virtue sorely lacking in the addict, but Pope Francis assures us that even trying to trust is a great beginning.

PONDER

What gave me the courage to consider recovery?

PRAY

God of health and wholeness, give me the courage to renew my commitment each day.

3 | WE ARE NOT ALONE

*Mary, our Mother, joins Jesus at our side,
ready to help us. The Lord is near,
offering consolation and hope.*

Many 12-step gatherings take place in church basements or meeting rooms. What is it about churches that makes them such appropriate spaces? Perhaps, Pope Francis suggests, it is because the church “is not distant, but accompanies you with affection.” What better place than where wounded healers gather with God to be about the business of putting ourselves back together? The pope also says that the Lord and his mother are at our side, so that we are never alone. When one suffers from a disease that is so isolating, it’s good to know we have a home!

PONDER

Is the church a safe haven for me?
Why or why not?

PRAY

God of health and wholeness, keep me safe and whole in your presence.

4 | GOD DOESN'T MAKE JUNK

All addicted persons continue to have, more than ever, dignity as persons and children of God.

Dignity, respect, trust, value—these words are not part of a practicing addict's vocabulary. Worthlessness, shame, regret—these are more like it! But Pope Francis states clearly that every addicted person is loved and cherished by God as a beloved child. Every addicted person has a personal history that needs to be heard and respected and honored because God created each one of us, and no one is garbage or junk to be cast aside. Because God honors each and every one of us, Pope Francis reminds us, we need to practice seeing ourselves and others as worthy. As is often said in 12-step rooms: simple, but not easy!

PONDER

What will it take for me to love myself?

PRAY

God of health and wholeness, help me to see with your eyes so that I may love better.

5 | REFLECTING GOD'S FACE

The neediest of our brothers and sisters, who seemingly have nothing to give, offer us a treasure—the face of God, which speaks to us and challenges us.

When one has some sobriety under one's belt it's humbling to see newcomers enter the room—terrified, perhaps angry and in denial, or just plain lost. Pope Francis challenges us all to “keep it green,” to remember that each of us reflects the face of God, no matter the roughness of our current condition. Can we offer a steady hand to the one shaking as it tries to pour coffee? Can we help turn despair into hope? Yes, says Pope Francis, this is our task, to see and honor God in everyone. No exceptions.

PONDER

Do I consciously try to see the face of God in everyone I meet?

PRAY

God of health and wholeness, help me remember the dark days so I can celebrate the light!

6 | WE MATTER

Don't ever think that we are just putting up with you. You are important.

Those in recovery have had a lot of experience being rejected, ostracized, and dismissed. Even in recovery, our disease tells us it is the only reliable constant in our life, and it keeps trying to reclaim its position. But when we are at our absolute lowest, another voice points us in a different direction, one that says we can be whole. Pope Francis himself says that we are welcome; we have a place; we belong. In fact, it's our experience that is going to help others feel less alone too. With the pope himself saying (in Christ's name) that we matter, how can we doubt it?

PONDER

Do I realize that I matter?

PRAY

God of health and wholeness, I remember wondering if you were there. Thank you for your acceptance and love.